

Abstract

Despite growing international interest with social protection, little is known about the forms of politics that tend to underpin - and emerge from - such interventions. For example, under what conditions do governments and political elites implement and sustain social protection policies? How important are the forms of politics promoted under the 'good governance' agenda, such as regular elections, civil society involvement and decentralisation? What role do donors play as political actors in poor countries? This paper starts to address these questions via a conceptual framework that is derived from synthesising an analysis of politics in Africa with a review of past social protection policies. This framework embraces four key dimensions: political institutions, political actors and agencies, socio-economic forces and the global dimension. It is argued that the notion of a 'political contract' can explain the ways in which these dimensions combine to shape the politics of social protection in Africa, and that this notion can offer a normative and theoretical framework for thinking about and promoting social protection.

Keywords: social protection, politics, Africa, political contract.

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